

## What Young Adults Want YOU to Know

Young adults with developmental disabilities face the same mental health challenges as their peers, but too often their symptoms are ignored, misdiagnosed, or written off as “part of the developmental disability.”



Members of the Montana Transition Training, Information and Resource Center (MT-TIRC) Advisory Board, themselves young adults with developmental disabilities, created this brochure to raise awareness of the mental health needs of youth with developmental disabilities and to suggest skills they think are important for mental health professionals to have when working with this population.

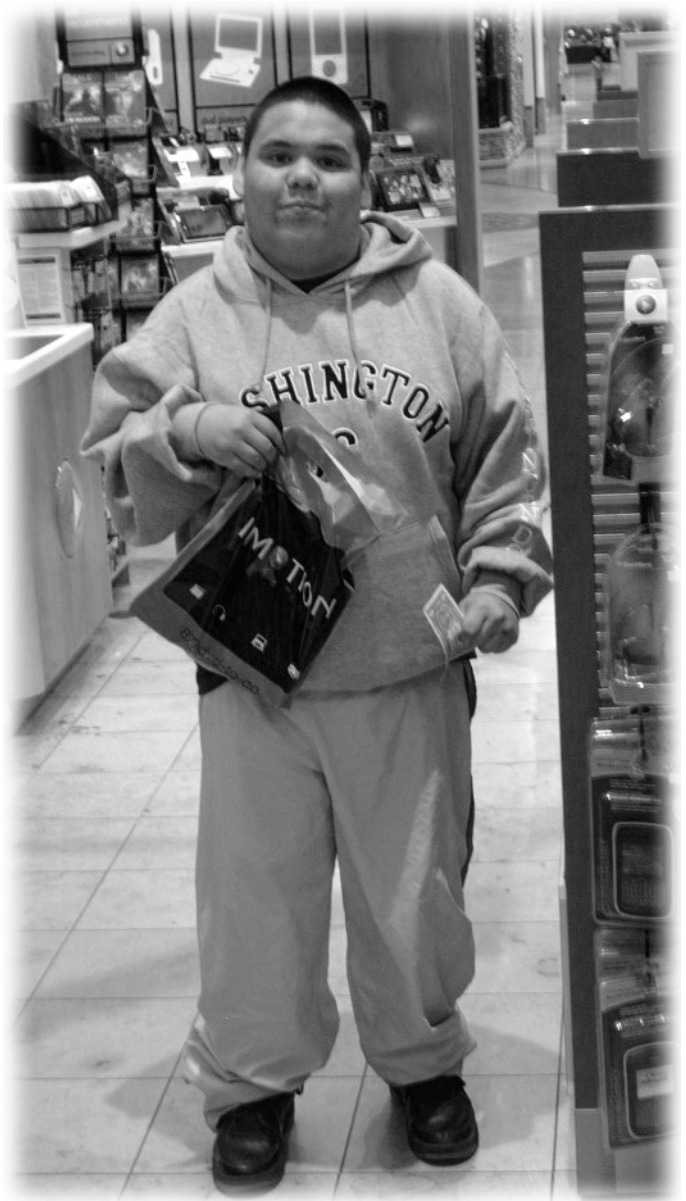
If you are a mental health professional, you might review the list and see if there are any areas where your skills could use some honing.

If you are a young adult with a developmental disability and mental health concerns, you might use the list to help identify a mental health professional to serve you.

## —What Skills Should a Mental Health Therapist Have?—

- Good listener who can help me share information about myself
- Talks to me, not to the staff person with me
- Rules out medical issues before assuming I have a mental illness
- With my permission, includes important people in my life in some of the counseling sessions
- Shows empathy, compassion, warmth, understanding and kindness
- Is trustworthy, but understands it might take me a while to develop trust in them
- Has patience...lots and lots of patience
- Comes up with creative ideas
- Gives out information about suicide and how to get help when needed, especially in an emergency/crisis situation
- Recognizes that most folks with disabilities have stress-related issues
- Is familiar with augmentative communication devices and how they work
- Has knowledge of my disability and how it affects me
- Knows something about my background so I don't have to repeat the same basic information over and over and over
- Can help me come up with a wellness plan for myself
- Is young him/herself or has lots of experience working with young people
- Understands that all young people (with and without disabilities) have similar challenges, and all young people can struggle with mental health issues...but sometimes the mental health issues can be harder to identify and can be more extreme in young people who have disabilities
- Recognizes that physical limitations can impact the ability to effectively communicate for various reasons (i.e., verbal, hearing, sight and cognitive abilities)
- Welcomes feedback from me on how well my mental health treatment is working, and explores options with me if it isn't working well

- Explores alternative methods of communication (drawing, painting, sign language, dance, facial expression books, music, videotaping, etc.)
- Respects and treats me as an individual; shares decision making with me
- Has high expectations of recovery for me...this means believing in my recovery when I cannot believe in it myself and when I am feeling helpless and hopeless
- Shows a willingness to be available when needed, not just when scheduled
- Possesses a good understanding of what promotes recovery: integration into society and family; work, school or useful activity; structured time; meaningful connections with family and friends; hobbies and social activities such as church, sports or clubs; and prompt and respectful medical supports for medications and other health problems, which includes shared decision making with the doctors.
- Understands that people with disabilities are capable of doing things...doesn't assume I can't do things just because I have a disability
- Understands that people with disabilities may need more time to think, answer, walk, talk, etc.
- Gives people hope; speaks to their gifts; celebrates strengths



## Resources

### Handbook of Mental Health Care for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

By Ruth Ryan, MD

### Psychotherapy for Individuals with Intellectual Disability

Edited by: Robert J. Fletcher, DSW, ACSW



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## **Youth Mental Health Bill of Rights (from the 2009 National Youth Summit)**

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**1. Youth have the right to be leaders of their psychiatric treatment plans.**

Youth should be informed of the possible side effects of medications, how long recommended medications take to go into effect, and the possible long-term effects of recommended medication. Service providers should work with youth to explore possible alternatives to using psychiatric medication before medication is given. Communication between youth and all medical providers should be collaborative, clear, and with limited use of medical terminology.

**2. Youth have the right to evaluate their mental health services.**

Mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other service providers should provide opportunities for youth to evaluate the satisfaction of their services throughout the duration of care in a respectful and non-threatening manner. This includes evaluation of the relationship with the provider, counseling plans, and implemented treatment models.

**3. Youth have the right to the most non invasive service transitions possible.**

When youth are transitioning into new services, mental health programs should strive to make the transition as accommodating as possible for the youth. Youth should be consulted on the ways they would like to end their relationship with the current provider and whether they would like the current provider to share their file with their new provider. Providers should share if there will be any changes in the costs of services and/or insurance coverage.

**4. Youth have the right to trained, sensitive treatment providers.**

Youth should have access to mental health professionals that are familiar with the unique needs and challenges of youth with mental health needs. All mental health professionals should have specialized training that fosters positive youth development and support. Youth mental health service consumers should be included in the creation and implementation of these trainings.

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### **Source**

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Strachan, R., Gowen, L. K., & Walker, J. S. (2009). The 2009 Portland National Youth Summit Report. Portland, OR: Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health, Portland State University.

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### **Contact**

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The Rural Institute: Center for Excellence in  
Disability Education, Research, and Service

700 SW Higgins,  
Suite 250 Missoula, MT 59803

Telephone: (406) 243-5467

TT: (406) 243-4200

Toll Free: (800) 732-0323

Fax: (406) 243-4730

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition>

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